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BY ORSON S. MURRAY.

"I AM SET FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE GOSPEL."

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Religious Miscellany.

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY. Chapter VI. REMARKS ON THE ARGUMENT FROM PROPHECY.

VI. Prophecy is another species of evidence to which Christianity professes an abundant claim, and which can be established on evidence altogether distinct from the testimony of its supporters. The prediction of what is future may not be delivered in terms so clear and intelligible as the history of what is past; and yet, in its actual fulfilment, it may leave no doubt on the mind of the inquirer that it was a prediction, and that the event in question was in the contemplation of him who uttered it. It may be easy to dispose of one isolated prophecy, by ascribing it to accident; but when we observe a number of these prophecies, delivered in different ages, and all bearing an application to the same events, or the same individual, it is difficult to resist the impression that they were actuated by a knowledge superior to human.

The obscurity of the prophetic language has been often complained of; but it is not so often attended to, that if the prophecy which foretells an event were as clear as the narrative which describes it, it would in many cases annihilate the argument. Were the history of any individual foretold in terms as explicit as it is in the power of narrative to make them, it might be competent for any usurper to set himself forward, and in as far as it depended upon his own agency, he might realize that history. He has no more to do than to take his lesson from the prophecy before him; but could it be said that fulfilment like this carried in it the evidence of any thing divine or miraculous? If the prophecy of a Prince and a Savior, in the Old Testament, were different from what they are, and delivered in the precise and intelligible terms of an actual history; then every accomplishment which could be brought about by the agency of those who understood the prophecy, and were anxious for its verification, is lost to the argument. It would be instantly said that the agents in the transaction took their clue from the prophecy before them. It is the way, in fact, in which infidels have attempted to evade the argument as it actually stands. In the New Testament, an event is sometimes said to happen, but it might be fulfilled what was spoken by some of the old prophets. If, however, which enters into the Gospel, had been under the control of agents merely human, and friends to Christianity, then we might have had reason to pronounce the whole history to be one continued process of artful and designed accommodation to the Old Testament prophecies. But the truth is, that many of the events pointed at in the Old Testament, so far from being brought about by the agency of Christians, were brought about in opposition to their most anxious wishes. Some of them were brought about by the agency of their most decided enemies;—and some of them, such as the dissolution of the Jewish state, and the dispersion of its people among all countries, were quite beyond the control of the apostles and their followers, and were effected by the intervention of a neutral party, which at the time took no interest in the question, and which was a stranger to the prophecy, though the unconscious instrument of its fulfilment.

Lord Bolingbroke has carried the objection so far, that he asserts Jesus Christ to have brought about his own death, by a series of wilful and preconcerted measures, merely to give the disciples who came after him the triumph of an appeal to the old prophecies. This is ridiculous enough; but it serves to show with what facility an infidel might have evaded the whole argument, had these prophecies been free of all that obscurity which is now so loudly complained of.

The best form for the purposes of argument, in which a prophecy can be delivered, is to be so obscure, as to leave the event, or rather its main circumstances, unintelligible before the fulfilment, and so clear as to be intelligible after it. It is easy to conceive that this may be an attainable object; and it is saying much for the argument as it stands, that the happy illustrations of this clearness on the one hand, and this obscurity on the other, are to be gathered from the actual prophecies of the Old Testament.

It is not, however, by this part of the argument, that we expect to reclaim the enemy of our religion from his infidelity; but that the examination will not be given. What a violence it would be offering to all his antipathies, were we to bring him, at the outset of our discussions, among the chapters of Daniel or Isaiah! He has too inveterate a contempt for the Bible. He nauseates the whole subject too strongly to be prevailed upon to accompany us to such an exercise. On such a subject as this, there is no contact, no approximation between us; and we therefore leave him with the assertion, (an assertion which he has no title to pronounce upon, till after he has finished the very examination in which we are most anxious to engage him,) that in the numerous prophecies of the Old Testament, there is such a multitude of allusions to the events of the New, as will give a strong impression to the mind of every inquirer, that the whole forms one magnificent series of communications between the visible and the invisible world; a

great plan over which the unseen God presides in wisdom, and which, beginning with the first ages of the world, is still receiving new developments from every great step in the history of the species.

It is impossible to give a complete exposition of this argument without an actual reference to the prophecies themselves; and this we at present abstain from. But it can be conceived, that a prophecy, when first announced, may be so obscure, as to be unintelligible in many of its circumstances; and yet may so far explain itself by its accomplishment, as to carry along with it the most decisive evidence of its being a prophecy. And the argument may be so far strengthened by the number, and distance, and independence, of the different prophecies, all bearing an application to the same individual and the same history, as to leave no doubt on the mind of the observer, that the events in question were in the actual contemplation of those who uttered the prediction. If the terms of the prophecy were not comprehended, it at least takes off the suspicion of the event being brought about by the control or agency of men who were interested in the accomplishment. If the prophecies of the Old Testament are just invested in such a degree of obscurity, as is enough to disguise many of the leading circumstances from those who lived before the fulfilment,—while they derive from the event an explanation satisfying to all who live after it, then, we say, the argument for the divinity of the whole is stronger, than if no such obscurity had existed. In the history of the New Testament, we see a natural and consistent account of the delusion respecting the Messiah, in which this obscurity has left the Jewish people; of the strong prejudices, even of the first disciples; of the manner in which these prejudices were dissipated, only by the accomplishment; and of their final conviction in the import of these prophecies being at last so strong, that it often forms their main argument for the divinity of that new religion which they were commissioned to publish to the world. Now, assuming, what we still persist in asserting, and ask to be tried upon, that an actual comparison of the prophecies in the Old Testament, with their alleged fulfilment in the New, will leave a conviction behind it, that there is a real correspondence between them; we see, in the great events of the new dispensation brought about by the blind instrumentality of prejudice and opposition, far more unambiguous characters of the finger of God, than if every thing had happened with the full concurrence and anticipation of the different actors in this history.

There is another essential part of the argument, which is much strengthened by this obscurity. It is necessary to fix the date of the prophecies, or to establish, at least, that the time of their publication was antecedent to the events to which they refer. Now, had these prophecies been delivered in terms so explicit, as to force the concurrence of the whole Jewish nation, the argument for their antiquity, would not have come down in a form as satisfying, as that in which it is actually exhibited. The testimony of the Jews, to the date of their sacred writings, would have been refused as an interested testimony. Whereas, to evade the argument as it stands, we must admit a principle, which, in no question of ordinary criticism, would be suffered for a single moment to influence your understanding.—We must conceive, that two parties, at the very time that they were influenced by the strongest mutual hostility, combined to support a fabrication; that they have not violated this combination; that the numerous writers on both sides of the question have not suffered the slightest hint of this mysterious compact to escape them; and that, though the Jews are galled incessantly by the triumphant tone of the Christian appeals to their own prophecies, they have never been tempted to let out a secret, which would have brought the argument of the Christians into disgrace, and shown the world how falsehood and forgery mingled with their pretensions.

In the rivalry which, from the very commencement of our religion, has always obtained between Jews and Christians, in the mutual animosities of Christian sects, in the vast multiplication of copies of the Scriptures, in the distant and independent societies which were scattered over so many countries, we see the most satisfying pledge, both for the integrity of the sacred writings, and for the date which all parties agree in ascribing to them. We hear of the many securities which have been provided in the various forms of registrations, and duplicates, and depositories; but neither the wisdom, nor the interest of men ever provided more effectual checks against forgery and corruption, than we have in the instance before us. And the argument, in particular, for the antecedence of the prophecies to the events in the New Testament, is so well established by the concurrence of the two rival parties, that we do not see, how it is in the power of additional testimony to strengthen it.

But neither is it true, that the prophecies are delivered in terms so obscure, as to require a painful examination, before we can obtain a full perception of the argument. Those prophecies which relate to the fate of particular cities, such as Nineveh, and Tyre, and Babylon; those which relate to the issue of particular wars, in which the kings of Israel and Judah were engaged; and some of those

which relate to the future history of the adjoining countries, are not so much veiled by symbolical language, as to elude the understanding, even of the most negligent observers. It is true, that in these instances, both the prophecy and the fulfilment appear to us in the light of a distant antiquity. They have accomplished their end. They kept alive the faith and worship of successive generations. They multiplied the evidences of the true religion, and account for a phenomenon in ancient history that is otherwise inexplicable, the existence and preservation of one solitary monument of pure theism in the midst of a corrupt and idolatrous world.

But to descend a little farther. We gather from the state of opinions at the time of our Savior so many testimonies to the clearness of the old prophecies.—The time and the place of our Savior's appearance in the world, and the triumphant progress, if not the nature of his kingdom, were perfectly understood by the priests and chief men of Judea. We have it from the testimony of profane authors, that there was, at that time, a general expectation of a prince and a prophet all over the East. The destruction of Jerusalem was another example of the fulfilment of a clear prophecy; and this, added to other predictions uttered by our Savior, and which received their accomplishment in the first generation of the Christian church, would have its use in sustaining the faith of the disciples amidst the perplexities of that anxious and distressing period.

We can even come down to the present day, and point to the accomplishment of clear prophecies in the actual history of the world. The present state of Egypt, and the present state of the Jews, are the examples which we fix upon. The one is an actual fulfilment of a clear prophecy; the other is also an actual fulfilment, and forms in itself the likeliest preparation for another accomplishment that is yet to come. Nor do we conceive, that these clear and literal fulfillments exhaust the whole of the argument from prophecy.—They only form one part of the argument, but a part so obvious and irresistible, as should invite every lover of truth to the examination of the remainder. They should secure such a degree of respect for the subject, as to engage the attention, and awaken even in the mind of the most rapid and superficial observer, a suspicion that there may be something in it. They should soften that contempt which repels so many from investigating the argument at all; or at all events, they render that contempt inexcusable.

The whole history of the Jews is calculated to allure the curiosity, and had it not been leagued with the defence and illustration of our faith, would have drawn the attention of many a philosopher, as the most singular exhibition of human nature that ever was recorded in the annals of the world. The most satisfying cause of this phenomenon is to be looked for in the history which describes its origin and progress; and by denying the truth of that history, you abandon the only explanation which can be given of this wonderful people. It is quite in vain to talk of the immutability of Eastern habits, as exemplified in the nations of Asia. What other people ever survived the same annihilating processes? We do not talk of conquest, where the whole amount of the effect is in general a change of dynasty or of government; but where the language, the habits, the denomination, and above all, the geographical position, still remain to keep up the identity of the people. But in the history of the Jews, we see a strong indestructible principle, which maintained them in a separate form of existence amid changes that no other nation ever survived. We confine ourselves to the overthrow of their nation in the first century of our epoch, and appeal to the disinterested testimonies of Tacitus and Josephus, if ever the cruelty of war devised a process of more terrible energy for the utter extirpation of a name, and a remembrance from the world. They have been dispersed among all countries. They have no common tie of locality or government to keep them together. All the ordinary principles of assimilation, which make law, and religion, and manners, so much a matter of geography, are in their instance suspended. Even the smallest particles of this broken mass have resisted an affinity of almost universal operation, and remain undiluted by the strong and overwhelming admixture of foreign ingredients. And in exception to every thing which history has recorded of the revolutions of the species, we see in this wonderful race a vigorous principle of identity, which has remained in undiminished force for nearly two thousand years, and still pervades every shred and fragment of their widely scattered population. Now if the infidel insists upon it, we shall not rest on this as an argument. We can afford to give it up: for in the abundance of our resources, we feel independent of it. We shall say that it is enough, if it can reclaim him from his levity, and compel his attention to the other evidences which we have to offer him.

All we ask of him is to allow, that the undeniable singularity which is before his eyes, gives him a sanction at least, to examine the other singularities to which we make pretensions. If he goes back to the past history of the Jews, he will see in their wars the same unexampled preservation of their name and their nation. He will see them surviving the process of an actual transportation into another country. In short, he will see them to be unlike all other people in what observation offers, and authentic history records of them; and the only concession that we demand of him from all this, is, that their pretensions to be unlike other people, in their extraordinary revelations from heaven, is at least possible, and deserves to be inquired into.

It may not be out of place to expose a species of injustice, which has often been done to the Christian argument. The defence of Christianity consists of several distinct arguments, which have sometimes been multiplied beyond what is necessary, and even sometimes beyond what is tenable. In addition to the main evidence which lies in the testimony given to the miracles of the Gospel, there is the evidence of collateral testimony; there is the internal evidence. The argument under each of these heads, is often made to undergo a further subdivision; and it is not to be wondered at, that in the multitude of observations, the defence of Christianity may often be made to rest upon ground, which, to say the least of it, is precarious or vulnerable. Now the injustice which we complain of, is, that when the friends of our religion are dislodged from some feeble outwork, raised by an unskilful officer in the cause, its enemies raise the cry of a decisive victory. But, for our own part, we could see her driven from all her defences, and surrender them without a sigh, so long as the phalanx of her historical evidence remains impregnable. Behind this unscaled barrier, we could entrench ourselves, and eye the light skirmishing before us with no other sentiment than of regret, that our friends should, by the eagerness of their misplaced zeal, have given our enemy the appearance of a triumph. We offer no opinion as to the two-fold interpretation of prophecy; but though it were refuted by argument, and disgraced by ridicule, all that portion of evidence which lies in the numerous examples of literal and unambiguous fulfilment remains unaffected by it. Many there are who deny the inspiration of the Song of Solomon. But in what possible way does this affect the records of the evangelical history? Just as much as it affects the lives of Plutarch, or the Annals of Tacitus. There are a thousand subjects on which infidels may idly push the triumph, and Christians be as idly galled by the severity, or even the truth of their observations. We point to the historical evidence of the New Testament, and ask them to dispose of it. It is there, that we call them to the onset; for there lies the main strength of the Christian argument. It is true, that in the evidence of prophecy, we see a rising barrier, which, in the progress of centuries, may receive from time to time a new accumulation to the materials which form it. In this way, the evidence of prophecy may come, in time, to surpass the evidence of miracles. The restoration of the Jews will be the fulfilment of a clear prophecy, and form a proud and animating period in the history of our religion. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness!

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VERMONT TELEGRAPH.

BRANDON, SATURDAY, FEB. 1, 1840.

From the Library of Health.
TIGHT LACING.
Concluded.

The Medical Cyclopædia, a work of high authority, under an excellent article on Physical Education, by Dr. Barlow, has a note from the pen of the Editor, to the following effect:

"We lately visited, in a large town, a boarding school containing forty girls, and we learned, on close and accurate inquiry, that there was not one of the girls who had been at the school two years, (and the majority had been there as long,) that was not more or less crooked. Our patient was in this predicament; and we could perceive that all her companions were pale, sallow and listless.—We can assert, on the same authority of personal observation, and on an extensive scale, that scarcely a single girl (more especially of the middle classes) that has been at school for two or three years, returns home with unimpaired health."

Some may say that these observations, being made on young ladies in Great Britain, do not apply to the U. States.—But why not? Are our frames made of different materials from those which are found the other side of the Atlantic? Is the confinement of our schools materially less? Or are we wiser than they in the art of escaping the punishment due to our errors and crimes?

Dr. Warren, of Boston, in a lecture delivered some years ago before the American Institute of Instruction, not only confirms the general views of Dr. Barlow, and applies them to the condition of things among us, but actually says, that "of the well educated females within the sphere of his experience, about one half are affected with some degree of distortion of the spine," as is manifested by the depression of one or the other of the shoulders. Nor is Dr. Warren alone. The testimony of most other observing medical men amounts to nearly the same thing.

The testimony of Haquet, a distin-

guished traveller and naturalist, on this point, is important. He examined, in detail, about the beginning of the French Revolution, several of the finest provinces of Turkey, and found both the men and women much better formed than we are, and more beautiful. This he attributes to the looseness of their costume, not subjecting the body to any constraint, and to the nature of their pursuits, living as they do very much in the open air.

Shaw, in his Treatise on Spinal Distortion, says:—"Deformity is peculiar to the civilized part of mankind, and is almost always the work of our own hands. The superior strength, just proportion and agility of savages, are entirely the effects of their hardy education, of their living mostly in the open air, and of their limbs never having suffered any confinement."

Now a distorted spine is a serious evil in many points of view. First. It by no means adds to beauty. Secondly. It embarrasses motion; for the nerves which go out from it in pairs, on each side, can hardly fulfil their office, and keep up so well a proper communication with "head quarters"—the spinal marrow and the brain—when compressed as when free.—Thirdly. The displacement of the spine causes a corresponding displacement of the stomach, liver, heart and lungs, especially the latter. They must all inevitably be pushed more or less out of their natural healthy position. Fourthly. The compression on the lungs, and heart, and stomach, produces what is called congestion of the blood, in those organs, and consequent inflammation in a greater or less degree.

In fact, the disturbance in the system is increased as soon as ever the shoulders begin to be rounded; for their bending forward and a little downward pushes the fore part of the ribs and breast-bone a little downward, inward and backward, so that they can press at once the lungs, heart, liver and stomach, not only hinder the vitalization of the blood, but interfere greatly with those important processes by which our systems are kept in their wonted repair—the formation of chyme, chyle and blood. But when the sideways curve is effected, the inflammation of the lungs proceeds to such a degree, as to induce all the symptoms of an incipient consumption—in which, indeed, unless the disturbing causes are removed, it sometimes ends. There is greater or less difficulty of breathing from the slightest exertion, a short, dry cough, and sometimes a degree of thirst, attended by other symptoms of hectic fever.

Compression of the chest, then, as we have seen, will induce a more hurried respiration, which is soon followed by a degree of inflammation in the lungs.—Not—we repeat it—that this inflammatory action always becomes so violent at once as to alarm us; though it sometimes does—as when we find consumption making its appearance. But whether there are any marks of serious disease or not, there is increased action. The individual who breathed, say but eighteen times in a minute, will now breathe twenty, or perhaps twenty-two. The heart also and its arteries, will act more rapidly in the same proportion, and be apt to become inflamed in the same degree; and as the arteries, large and small, communicate, of course, with the whole system, the inflamed action becomes propagated to every part.—Let a body which has fallen into this state be examined, and there will be few of its parts which, instead of retaining their natural healthy state, will not possess more or less of what is usually called an angry appearance.

Now how can a person who is thus circumstanced expect long to maintain health, or even escape violent disease? Or if we can suppose this angry or sub-inflamed state to remain just the same from year to year, and the person to retain the appearance of what is usually called tolerable health, yet this is not the end of the matter. Whenever disease breaks out in the system—and break out it will sooner or later in one form or another, if it is nothing more than a cold—such disease, aggravated and rendered far more unmanageable by the generally inflamed state of the system, will be much more apt to prove dangerous and even fatal than in other circumstances.—Not even the yellow fever, the plague, the cholera, or the consumption itself, the worst and most fatal plague of all, could prove very mischievous in the world, but for that series of preparations, so long making in the system, for receiving and feasting it whenever it arrives;—how much more then is this the case with other diseases?

Because pain is not always felt in the stomach, lungs and other internal organs immediately after the sources of irritation operate, there are thousands who believe that no injury is inflicted. Nothing can be more untrue than such a belief. Nothing can be better demonstrated by medical men, than that nearly every internal organ of the human system may be more or less obstructed in the performance of its office or function, and even inflamed, without our being aware of it. Nay, it may not only remain in this inflamed condition for a long time, but may actually be every day growing worse, and yet all the while we may not have the slightest suspicion of any disease.

This is especially the case in regard to abuses of the lungs. The organs may be compressed a long time before we perceive any suffering from the compress-

ion. It is true we may at times have bad feelings, but we do not suspect them to be in any way connected with error in regard to dress. Even the slightest suggestion of a medical man that this was the case would probably be repelled. Or if the suggestion was heeded at first, and the compression removed, the system, having become accustomed to depend upon artificial support, there is now a degree of uneasiness for the want of it.

But the more the dress is tightened, the more it may be tightened. And the tighter we wear it without producing actual pain, the tighter we may do so, till finally we become capable not only of enduring, but even of enjoying, in some measure, a degree of compression which at first would have been absolutely insupportable.

Let us describe the bodily condition of an individual, in these circumstances, we mean that of one who says, and probably believes, she is healthy.

The bones of her chest are brought from the form of a sugar-loaf, as has been already mentioned, to that of a sugar-loaf inverted. The breast-bone is also pushed out of its place more or less, if not actually curved.*

What compresses the lungs, at the same time compresses the heart, so that it can neither dilate freely to receive the venous blood, nor contract with energy to send it off to the lungs to be purified. Nor can the large pipe through which the blood, after being purified, is sent out to all parts of the body, cramped as it is at the great bend just above the heart, duly perform its office. The liver is pushed downwards, and compressed or wedged in between the lower edge of the ribs and the back side of the abdomen, and also pushed against the lungs above it.

What happens to the heart and liver, befalls also the stomach, only that the pylorus or outlet of the latter, owing to its position, is particularly disabled, and also that the greater part of this organ, instead of being pinched between the ribs and back-bone, is pressed down upon the intestines, the kidneys, bladder, &c., in such a way as greatly to impede their operations.

Now this compression—this cramping as it were—of all these organs, whose full and free action is so necessary to health, produces results not wholly unlike those which are produced on the lungs.—By hasty, disturbed and forced efforts, they endeavor to make up in frequency of motion, what is lost in space. This can not fail to produce inflammatory action, and finally derangement of function and even of structure.

Again—no sooner do the lungs begin to suffer, than the heart suffers also—more from sympathy, perhaps, than from actual compression or contact. So it is also with the stomach and liver, and with all the internal organs. Nay, still more. It is not one "member" or organ alone which suffers, and which seems to excite the sympathies of the others, and to cause derangement in the performance of their functions, severally, but all the organs excite the sympathies of all the other organs, and suffer with them all. The stomach, for example, not only suffers by sympathy with the sufferings of the lungs, but by sympathizing also with all the other organs. For these all, like the stomach, seem to feel the sorrows of their suffering neighbor, and equally anxious, as it were, to remove them, join in the general struggle to get rid of the cause or causes which produce them.

Hence that long train of troublesome complaints with which half the world—an important half, too—are so generally afflicted in modern time, has its origin, in no small degree, in compression of the chest. For the action of the lungs, heart and arteries, can not possibly be elevated to a degree which constitutes inflammation in these parts, and continue long in that state, without inducing a corresponding want of action elsewhere. Yet as right action in other parts requires perfect health and vigor, not only of those other parts, but of the whole system, in order that they may perform their wonted office, they can not do otherwise than become subjected to suffering. Let those for whom this paragraph is written, take heed which its exceeding great importance to their welfare most essentially demands†

* We have seen one female, about 14 years of age, in whom the lower part of the breast-bone was turned inward, so as to cause some degree of displacement of the organs beneath, and affect both her respiration and circulation. Yet not only herself, but her mother also, strongly insisted that her dress had never been in the least degree too tight.—A physician, of Longwood, Virginia, stated some time ago, in the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, a case of compression, whose effects had gone so far as to form a complete groove or excavation round the body. After giving the details of the case, and especially of the diminished size of both the soft and hard parts of the chest, he asks, "How could it be otherwise than that sterility should follow as a natural consequence?"

† But we might bring cases of the same general character to an indefinite extent. The wonder is that the consequences to which this writer refers, as well as other evils almost infinitely worse, are not more common than they now are.

‡ The physicians of Austria, Bavaria, and other southern countries of Germany, believe, that the licentiousness which prevails among the higher classes of those countries, especially in the large cities, has its origin, as one of its leading causes, in that compression of the chest which, if it did not originate in the old world, has at least found its way thither. By compressing the lungs and obstructing the circulation of the blood there, an increased amount of this vital fluid is determined to other parts of the system. This increased amount of blood in those parts of the system to which it is sent is not without its effect; and joined to the stimulants of high-seasoned wines, abundance of condiments, exciting drinks and other well known causes of obstruction and heat, has no little agency in producing those deplorable results to which we refer. Especially is it aided by medical men, that these circumstances, particularly